

# Addressing Extreme Weather and Climate to Feed Puerto Rico

With each passing year, Puerto Rico is more and more negatively impacted by climate change. Natural disasters and extreme drought are regularly putting food access and security at risk. It's estimated that 40% of families are food insecure, with residents of the smaller surrounding islands being impacted the most.

Ana Elisa Quintero and Elda Guadalupe are co-directors of La Colmena Cimarrona, a partnership of farmers and community members on the island of Vieques. They are working to create food sovereignty in the archipelago of Puerto Rico.

They came to StoryCorps to remember how it first began...

## Transcript:

**Elda Guadalupe:** What do you remember about the food growing up in Puerto Rico?

**Ana Elisa Quintero:** There was not a lot of fresh food. I would see some vegetables but they were mostly canned or very processed. Most of the food for us grew in the supermarket.

My dad died from pancreatic cancer when I was 13, and I started a vegetable garden right at our school. It was my way of healing that loss. And at the beginning, people started jumping the fence to steal. But then we started talking with folks and giving out food and cooking together. And it really made sense to dedicate my life to growing food.

Farming here in Vieques is a lot of work, and all of the planning that we need to do is constantly changing because of climate change. But there's this phrase like "Tu quieras finca? Hay una finca." You wanted a farm? Then there's the farm. Days are long, but it's very gratifying.

**Elda:** How is the farm adapting to climate change?

**Ana Elisa:** So we're in an island that is very dry and very hot. And as climate change keeps advancing, our droughts are longer or more harsh and don't come in the times that we're used to. So we're doing a lot of experiments and also planting more crops that are resilient to events like hurricanes.

**Elda:** What would you say was the hardest thing to see during Hurricane Maria?

**Ana Elisa:** In Vieques particularly, food insecurity is even more obvious than in the main island because we depend on a ferry system for all of our food. So every time there's some natural disaster, our food source gets cut off.

And I remember there were vagones, trailers, of food that came into the island and literally rotted because the government never gave them out. That was the most harsh for me to see.

**Elda:** We started seeing the real state of emergency that was happening. In those first weeks, there was nobody that could bring help. We said, "Well, we have to do something."

**Ana Elisa:** We had both thought about gathering resources in a sort of mutual aid center. And I don't know if you remember this Elda, but we were in the corner of the Methodist church, in the middle of this chaos. And we were like, oh, we've been thinking about doing a community kitchen.

**Elda:** Having hot food and having a place to get together with the community to share stories was very important. It was a place where the community felt safe, and they also felt helpful.

**Ana Elisa:** I hope that we are providing tools to grow our own food and ways of resisting. And trying to create better livelihoods for ourselves and our community.

That's what I hope.